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Mr. ROSCOE'S

ANSWER

To Mr. MERRITT.

AN
ANSWER
TO
A LETTER
FROM
Mr. JOHN MERRITT,
ON THE SUBJECT OF
PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

BY WILLIAM ROSCOE.

“The COMMONS consist of *all such men of any property* in the kingdom, as have not seats in the House of Lords; *every one of which* has a voice in Parliament, either *personally* or by *his representatives*. In a free state, EVERY MAN, who is supposed a free agent, ought to be, in some measure, his own governor; and therefore a branch at least of the legislative power should reside IN THE WHOLE BODY OF THE PEOPLE.”

Blackstone's Commentaries, book 1, chap. 2.

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SIR,

WHATEVER reluctance I may feel in offering myself again to the notice of the public in the character of a political writer, your letter addressed to me on the subject of Parliamentary Reform, as a reply to the arguments and statements contained in mine to Mr. Brougham, has removed my objections. The subject itself is of great importance.—The opinions of the thinking part of the public—of those who interest themselves in the welfare and tranquillity of the country, are divided; not only as to the specific nature of such a reform, but as to the expediency of any reform whatever. It was the object of my letter to Mr. Brougham to conciliate these opinions, and to state the leading features of such a reform as might be

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effectual, safe and practicable. To this, your letter purports to be an answer. It appears to me to be written with sincerity and candour. Authorities, arguments, and facts are resorted to; and the result is, that you consider yourself as having proved, either, *that a reform is not indispensibly requisite*, or that, at all events, *the measures recommended, and intended to be brought forwards by Mr. Brougham, would be amply sufficient for the purpose.*

Entertaining as I do the highest opinion of the talents and intentions of Mr. Brougham, it was not without great diffidence that I ventured to dissent from him; and that, not in our ultimate view of the subject, but in manner and detail only. My letter to him was not intirely voluntary, but was in reply to one from him, in which he had most clearly explained the various measures which he thought essential to the restoration of the constitution. Nor was it hastily laid before the public; having remained twelve months before it was committed to the press. I had therefore sufficient time for deliberation, and having ventured to advance sentiments differing, in some respects, from the considerate and mature opinions of that gentleman, I now feel it

due to him, no less than to myself, to shew that I did not rashly enter upon so grave a topic, and that my statements and conclusions are not without foundation.

On the question at issue, you have, as well as every other individual, a right to judge; and I hesitate not to acknowledge that I should have been gratified had your opinion been in my favour. From the knowledge I have long had of your character and political sentiments, I consider you as an effective member of a large and very respectable class of the community; and I therefore augur that my labour has been incomplete, and that I have hitherto failed to produce on others, those convictions which I myself so strongly feel. Under these circumstances, I do not regret that I am called upon to vindicate my opinions, and that an opportunity is afforded me of stating, more fully than I have hitherto done, the grounds and principles on which they are founded.—I have now therefore to request that you will accompany me in giving the subject a further consideration; when I am not without hopes that you may be induced to review your sentiments, and perhaps to concur with me in your conclusions. In this I shall at least have a power-

ful auxiliary in the very letter which you have done me the honour of addressing to me ; and which, I assure you with great sincerity, I cannot but consider as containing much stronger reasons for a reform in the representation of the people, than any that are to be found in my brief address to Mr. Brougham.

I will however confess that these motives, sufficient as I think them, are not the only reasons which have induced me to reply to your letter. Important as the question of parliamentary reform certainly is, subjects of still greater magnitude are connected with the discussion. Whoever has attended to the publications of the present day, cannot but have observed the tendency, in almost all writers, to narrow and confine, rather than to invigorate and expand, not only the sentiments and affections of the heart, but also the powers and operations of the mind. Whatever professes to look beyond the ordinary routine of affairs, is denominated *theory* ; and he who would attempt to reform the most acknowledged abuse that can endanger or disgrace a country, is denominated *a theorist*. On the other hand, those persons who are hostile to all improvement, have as-

sumed to themselves the appellation of *practical men*; a title which they seem to think confers on them some degree of credit, whatever the nature of their practices may be. In the course of recent events, and particularly from the circumstances of the revolution in France, these persons conceive they have obtained a great triumph; and that because the French people did not succeed in an attempt in itself highly laudable, but in which they were interrupted, frustrated, and counteracted, by those who had no right to interfere with them, no effort should ever be made to resist the incroachments of power, or to correct the errors, improve the institutions, or exalt the character of a country. Of this very general feeling, I am sorry to observe, your letter affords an additional proof. We there find it stated, as the opinion of a *great Philosopher*, that “*in the study of politics it very generally happens, that* WHAT IS THEORETICALLY TRUE IS PRACTICALLY FALSE.” “*And you add, without giving an intire assent to this seeming paradox, it may safely be assumed as a postulate, that there is no science in which first appearances are so often fallacious; none, in which the reasonings drawn a priori*

“from general appearances differ so widely from those deduced a posteriori, from the evidence of facts; none in which the ultimate results will defeat so often the intentions of the original plan.” Sentiments similar to these are distributed through the first part of your letter, and are too much in unison with the fashion of the day, not to deserve particular notice.

Allow me, then, to observe, that the assertion made in this *seeming paradox* of a *great Philosopher*, by whom I presume you mean the late Mr. Burke, is wholly unfounded. That which is *true* in theory, cannot be *practically false*. A *theory* may, indeed, be false, and the practice founded upon it must then be erroneous; but a *true theory* is, in fact, the definition of those laws, by which any actual operation is effected; and if such laws be rightly defined, it is impossible such theory should be false, when applied to practice. It is thus that the theory of laws is the result of the various combinations of civil society, and is derived from the nature, constitution and conduct of man, as exemplified in his relations with others. Thus the theory of poetry is derived from the

examples and writings of the most distinguished poets; and until these examples were given, no theory could have been formed. In like manner the theory of politics is founded on the conduct of mankind in their political, and civil capacities; on the observation of what has actually taken place in different ages and nations; and if from these it be accurately drawn, or in other words, if it be *theoretically true*, it cannot be *practically false*. To suppose that a true theory can be founded upon any other ground, is to suppose that we can reason upon human affairs with ideas other than what human affairs supply us with; but when once these results are discovered, it is of the highest importance to embody them into rules, and to regard them as the guides of our future conduct.

To your commentary on the maxim you have cited, my objections are of a different kind. Undoubtedly it must be admitted, that in applying political theories to practical use, great difficulties are encountered; and that great disappointments must frequently be experienced. In the political as in the physical world, a small portion of leaven will infect the whole mass. The wickedness and perversity of a few individuals,

may give rise to obstacles, which the wisdom and virtue of thousands may not be able to overcome. It may not therefore follow, that because a theory is *true*, it must *always succeed* when attempted to be reduced to practice; but the failure under such circumstances will no more prove the falsehood of the theory, than the conduct of those who call themselves christians, and at the same time delight in war and devastation, can be said to prove the falsehood of the christian religion.

Amongst other means to which these practical men have resorted to injure the cause of reform, towards whatever object it may be directed, it is not unusual for them to represent the advocates for improvement as *men of warm hearts but weak understandings*, who are apt to attribute to mankind in general better qualities than they in reality possess, and who are therefore always mistaken in their reasonings respecting them. Nor can it be denied that, if we are to judge from the result of their efforts, there often appears to be too much reason for the imputation. This, however, is not a *necessary*, much less an *inevitable* consequence; and he who forms his political creed on a presumption of *the general depravity of mankind*,

is perhaps liable to fall into as great, and certainly a much more dangerous error, than he whose experience leads him to attribute to the rest of mankind, *some portion* of those better principles for which he expects that the rest of the world should give him credit. Dark as the political horizon may appear, yet if we look into the circles of private life, we shall find that integrity, truth, and justice, are not yet exploded amongst mankind—that magnanimity excites admiration, generosity gratitude, and that all the best feelings and affections of the heart, yet exist in their full force. Where, then, is the absurdity of presuming that he who would not commit *a dishonest action* in private life, would not lend his aid to *an act of public injustice*? That he who would not be guilty of *a highway robbery*, would not willingly associate himself with *a band of pirates*? That he who would shudder at the thought of *murdering his neighbour*, would not, for the sake of his private emolument, instigate or encourage a war, in which *thousands of his neighbours* must inevitably perish? It is only by extending his sphere of action, and supposing that an individual will most probably perform upon a large scale, the same part that he does upon a small

one, and the absurdity vanishes. What would be the condition of private society, if envy, jealousy, fear, distrust and hatred, were the only feelings by which mankind were actuated? but still more unfortunate is it, when these dreadful and unsocial passions are intermingled in the character of nations, and influence the conduct of states towards each other. The former is only an *accidental and local disease*; the latter is a *sweeping pestilence*, by which whole nations are destroyed. These, I may be told are *truisms*, but when truisms are forgotten or disregarded, their truth is surely no objection against their being revived and enforced. What, then, has the politician to do, but to apply to the affairs of nations, and the intercourse of states, those principles of morality which he finds in the relations of private life? to banish the absurd and dangerous maxim, that *there is one line of moral conduct for nations and another for individuals*, to exemplify in public, those maxims of justice, sincerity, moderation, and good will, towards which every government pays a *nominal homage*, and which are the very cement of private society; and to render a government *the example and pattern*, and not the *corruption and opprobrium of a people*?

In entering on our more immediate subject, I observe with pleasure, that your objections to the plan proposed in my letter to Mr. Brougham, have not deterred you from doing justice to the principles on which it is founded. These propositions are, I. *That every representative should be fairly and impartially elected by the voice of the people;* and II. *that when returned, he should not be placed in the way of being corrupted by the crown.* On these you observe that “*to the view of abstract consideration this alteration appears perfectly rational, and quite commensurate to its objects.*” That “*it seems to strike at the root of almost all the existing evils.*” That “*it appears to concur with the original design of those who first meditated the British constitution.*” Nor will you, as you say, “*have the presumption to affirm, though you think the supposition improbable, that its ultimate effects might not be beneficial.*” On the other hand, you state, that “*of an untried order of things, where experience affords so little light to guide our conjectures, it is not very easy to foretel the issue;*” That “*you have not the least doubt that such a change, however it might leave untouched the forms of the constitution, would alter essentially its entire character and actual*

“operation.” That “you are of opinion it could
 “not possibly succeed in improving the represen-
 “tation, by accommodating it to the present state
 “of the country; and that you are afraid it
 “would hazard the introduction of many unex-
 “pected evils, of unknown, and THEREFORE OF
 “INCALCULABLE MAGNITUDE.”

On these passages I might perhaps, with great justice observe, that as you have in your letter explicitly admitted, that every person born under equal laws, and contributing to the exigencies and support of the state, has equal political rights with his fellow subjects; if the consequences of restoring to him those privileges should be unfavourable to the public tranquillity, this is not an argument against their restoration, but an impeachment of those who are the enemies of common justice; and who rather choose to plunge themselves and others into difficulties and commotion, than to relinquish their undue advantages. On this, however, I have no occasion to insist; as my propositions are perfectly defensible on other grounds, without the supposition of any such extreme case, the necessity of which no one would deprecate more than myself. I am therefore willing to admit, with

you, that in order to form a proper judgment of them, we must consider them, not in their *acknowledged and positive truth*, but in their relations with *the character of the people, and the present state of this Country*. Let us then ask, whether there be any reason to presume, that a House of Commons, chosen by the general will of the people, is more likely to be injurious to the electors, or dangerous to the constitution, than a House of Commons whose authority is derived from a very inconsiderable number of the Inhabitants? On the contrary, as the former is acknowledged to be consistent with right and justice, it may be presumed that it will, in its conduct, exemplify the principles on which it is founded; whilst the latter is more likely in its operations, to betray the imperfections of its origin. If the fountain be pure, there is reason to hope that the stream may be pure also; but if the fountain itself be corrupt, how can we expect that the waters should be free from stain?

Neither is it to any presumed impracticability that may attend the introduction of a reform, that your objections apply. That "*such a plan might pass the Legislature without difficulty, and be carried into effect with little interruption,*

you have no doubt." Nay, you further conceive, that "*as a mere improvement on the old mode of conducting public elections, its utility is obvious and admitted.*"

Thus the question in debate between us is already reduced into a narrow compass. The concessions you have made are important—the *abstract justice of such a reform* as I have proposed, and *the practicability of its execution* are undoubtedly highly favourable to the expediency of the measure; and although passages may be found in your letter derogatory in some degree to the latter admission, yet I must take it for granted, that opinions so strongly enounced as those in the passages quoted, are your deliberate and decided convictions. You conceive, however, (and certainly there is nothing in the above concessions that precludes you from such a supposition) that "*it is not in the execution, but in the consequences of such a measure, that the danger consists;*" and in order to demonstrate this, you have entered upon an enquiry into the nature and practice of the British constitution, the result of which, you state to be, that "*before the revolution in 1688, the three estates of the realm exercised their respective powers distinctly, and ostensibly;*

“controlling, invading, or contesting the func-
 “tions of each other; in a manner very remote
 “from the theoretical perfection of the constitution,
 “but yet in some sort of conformity to the mag-
 “nificent outline.” That “the revolution super-
 “vened to this state of things, and threw into the
 “hands of the commons an immense preponderance
 “of power. The haughty assumptions of the Tu-
 “dors, and the “management” of the Stewarts,
 “alternately intimidating and cajoling, were no
 “longer practicable, and that therefore the MANY
 “HEADED MONSTER MUST BE LED, WHEN IT
 “COULD BE NO LONGER DRIVEN.” “This,”
 you add, “is the well known secret and spring of
 “the great change, which seems so marvellous in
 “our eyes. HENCE COMES THE SYSTEM OF IN-
 “FLUENCE AND CORRUPTION.” A system, with-
 out which, you have not scrupled to assert,
 that “the fabric of our constitution, with all its
 “perfection, must have gone speedily to decay, and
 “which not only saved it from falling, BUT HAS
 “RESTORED IT TO ITS STRENGTH AND EQUILI-
 “BRIUM.” In accounting for the introduction of
 this fortunate discovery, you inform us, “that the
 “expensive wars and heavy taxes of King William
 “and Queen Ann, created a multitude of new offices
 “and dependencies, which have ever since been ra-

*pidly and continually increasing ;” that “ sine-
 cure places and pensions were also MULTIPLIED
 WITHOUT NUMBER, and that we have reason to
 believe DIRECT BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION were
 frequently practised ; though,” as you pointedly
 remark, “ such OFFENSIVE EXPEDIENTS ARE NOW
 BECOME UNNECESSARY. That all this created a
 mass of temptation, by which the adherents of the
 Court could be CONVENIENTLY REWARDED, and
 its opponents EFFECTUALLY SILENCED.” That
 the House of Commons then became the ARENA,
 on which the contests and struggles of the three
 estates were in future to be exhibited. That any
 measure obnoxious to the court, which is initiated
 in that House, can thus BE STIFLED IN EM-
 BRYO ; and any measure which the executive
 government wishes to have proposed, can be
 brought forward by its partizans, and STRONGLY
 SUPPORTED.” That “ the contest then lies be-
 tween THOSE WHO ARE INFLUENCED, and
 THOSE WHO ARE NOT.” That “ THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE KING AND THE PEERS
 balance their strength against THE REMAINDER
 OF THE HOUSE, and the question is decided as the
 fluctuating strength of either party may happen
 to prevail.”*

In order that we may be at no loss to understand what is meant by the new title of the REPRESENTATIVES OF THE KING AND PEERS, you further inform us, that “*the action of the monarch and the peers on the third estate, is not felt by the commons merely in their corporate capacity;*” that “*the interference is CONNATE, AND ELEMENTAL.*” That “*it is concerned equally in the functions of the ELECTORS and the ELECTED.*” That “*the King, Lords and Commons NOW UNITE IN CHOOSING THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE.*” That “*they join IN THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, when assembled in parliament,*” and that “*the votes of that House, which commonly fix the destinies of the nation, express THE CONSENT OF KING, LORDS AND COMMONS.*”

Not satisfied, however, with giving us this view of your *new and improved constitution of Great Britain*, you have thought it necessary to produce some instances of the *practical effects* of such a system. For the system itself, you are a professed advocate; but you *suspect* that there may yet be discovered in it some causes for dissatisfaction. “*The promptness and vigour of the monarchy perhaps,*” you observe,

“ require a degree of power in the lower House,
 “ sufficient to conduct the ordinary business of
 “ Government, without much interruption, and
 “ perhaps to influence their decision in certain
 “ questions of dubious import. But this is all that
 “ can be allowed. It OUGHT NOT to enable the
 “ servants of the crown to carry an important
 “ question against the plain dictates of justice,
 “ the unbiased opinion of the house, and the
 “ clear sense of the nation.” This you admit,
 “ is in some cases a line very difficult to be dis-
 “ covered ; but in others it is palpable and unequiv-
 “ vocal.” “ There is not perhaps,” you observe,
 “ in the history of England, a stronger or a clearer
 “ case of ministerial delinquency than the cele-
 “ brated *Walcheren Expedition*. Certainly there
 “ has been no event since the accession of the
 “ House of Brunswick, so strongly calculated to
 “ rouse the spirit and independence of parliament.
 “ On a dispassionate survey of the history of the
 “ whole transaction, it seems quite impossible that
 “ there could be two opinions on the subject ; and
 “ yet, the authors of that disastrous project, under-
 “ taken not only without, but against the consent of
 “ their own confidential advisers, were not merely
 “ NOT CONDEMNED FOR THEIR CONDUCT, but
 “ EXPRESSLY APPLAUDED BY A MAJORITY OF

“ THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. *In the cases of*
 “ *Lord Melville, and the Duke of York, though*
 “ *the culpability of the accused persons was by no*
 “ *means equally evident, the sense of the House*
 “ *seemed to be still more unanimous. Yet one*
 “ *of these high official servants of the crown was*
 “ IMPEACHED BY THE CASTING VOTE OF THE
 “ SPEAKER ALONE, and the other was ACQUIT-
 “ TED BY A CONSIDERABLE MAJORITY. *These*
 “ *instances, and MANY OTHERS, WHICH IT*
 “ *MIGHT APPEAR INVIDIOUS TO ACCUMULATE,*
 “ *seem to indicate the existence of a degree of*
 “ *influence, which, if it should continue to in-*
 “ *crease, would threaten, at no distant period, to*
 “ ANNIHILATE THE CHIEF USES OF THE LOWER
 “ HOUSE AS A DELIBERATIVE BODY.”

Such then, is, it seems, the present *theory*
 and *practise* of the British constitution, as
 stated, *by yourself*, for the purpose of demon-
 strating the great cause of alarm and apprehen-
 sion which may be justly entertained from any
 reform in the representation of the people;
 and if it could be supposed that your represen-
 tations are well founded, it may safely be as-
 serted, that it is not possible to state a condi-
 tion of political society more alarming in its

consequences, or more repugnant to the feelings of an Englishman, than that which you have not scrupled to describe. *If this were the system of the government*, it is of all engines of oppression undoubtedly the worst. The conflicts that arose between the contending powers of king, lords and commons, in former times, are, beyond all comparison, preferable to the dead, spiritless, unelastic pressure of such a government. In comparison with this, a direct and open despotism is liberal and magnanimous.—By whatever name the ruler may be distinguished, he there appears in his own character, and is himself responsible to public opinion for the manner in which he exercises his authority; but if such a ruler can, by any contrivance, establish an intermediate body between himself and the people, who shall be supposed to guard their rights and defend their interests, whilst in fact they are only the creatures of the crown, corrupted and paid to sanction every act, and interpose as a screen between the odium and resentment of the people and the misconduct of their rulers, this, of all the situations in which a country can be placed, is the most fatal, the most humiliating, and the most hopeless. It is calculated not only to *oppress*, but

to *insult* a nation. It is to tyrannize over them by *their own consent*, and to close their lips against *even complaint and remonstrance*. It bears with it, in short, the worst features of the gloomy reign of Tiberius, and threatens this once favored country with a long series of abject despondency, servility and disgrace.*

It is, however, of such a government as this, that you have thought proper to express your apprehensions, that the proposed reform in the representation of the people would *essentially alter* its intire character, and actual operation. Is it then possible that it could be altered for the worse? According to your own representation, it has been found, that in *the strongest and clearest case of ministerial delinquency*, on which *it was quite impossible there could be two opinions*, the delinquents were not only *not condemned*, but *expressly applauded*

* “*Quinetiam speciem libertatis quandam induxit, conservatis senatui ac magistratibus, et majestate pristina, et potestate. Neque tam parvum quidquam, neque tam magnum, publici privatique negotii fuit, de quo non ad P. C. referretur.*”

Sueton. in vit. Tiber.

by a majority of the House of Commons! What then is the consequence of this, but that ministers are not only *suffered to proceed* in a course of conduct, which must inevitably bring down ruin and disgrace upon the country, but are *absolutely applauded and encouraged* in their misconduct by the representatives of the people?

With what consistency either with the feelings of patriotism, or the dictates of common sense, any man can avow his fears and apprehensions of an essential alteration in the *entire character and operation* of such a Representative body, I am at a loss to conceive. That the evil exists to a most alarming extent, is not only asserted by yourself in the most unequivocal language, but proved by irrefragable evidence; that the proposed remedy is *essentially just, adequate to its object, and practicable in its execution*, you have most explicitly allowed; but you still continue to deprecate the consequences that may arise from its adoption, and contend that it would hazard the introduction of “*many unexpected evils of unknown, and therefore of incalculable magnitude?*” what evils can a country sustain greater than the loss of its liberties? to say

nothing of the long list of calamities, that always follow in the train of corruption and arbitrary power? the *slaughter of the People* in sanguinary and unnecessary wars, the *oppressive weight of taxation*, and the *general diffusion of dissatisfaction, poverty, and distress*? To point out *evils greater than these*, you would certainly find it a difficult task; yet this is the state to which we are, it seems, advised to submit, rather than even *hazard* the introduction of evils, the nature or extent of which *not being known*, we are to consider as of **INCALCULABLE MAGNITUDE!**—Vain and empty terrors! tending only to inculcate a base and degrading submission to *any extreme of tyranny*, and which vanish like mists before the light of reason, and the clear and courageous eye of truth!

I must not, however, allow you to take it for granted, that because I contend that under such a system of corruption as you have depicted, it would be impossible to change for the worse, I have the least idea of agreeing with you in your conclusions, that the House of Commons would, in case it were restored to its respectability and independance, be found dangerous to the other two estates of the Legislature.

This idea you have, indeed, expanded with peculiar emphasis; and have endeavoured to shew that the two upper branches of the legislature could not long resist the increasing power of a popular assembly, constituted by the impartial voice of the people. These statements and apprehensions appear to me chimerical and groundless; not founded in fact; not sanctioned by reason. As placed in contradistinction to the other branches of the legislature, the power of the House of Commons has not increased. It is *the power of the crown and aristocracy, acting through the medium and in the name of the House of Commons*, that, according to your own exposition, *has increased, and now forms the one and indivisible government of the country*.—During the debates that lately arose respecting the privileges of parliament, when the House of Commons exercised its powers of censure and commitment in a manner highly alarming to the friends of the constitution, who were the parties that stood most prominently forward in carrying those privileges and powers to their full extent? Who, but the ministers of the crown, and their accustomed parliamentary supporters? What, then, is the direct inference from this fact? That *the power of the*

House is the power of the Minister, and that every increase of it is, in fact, an increase of the power of the crown. Even the very privileges intended to enable the House to maintain its independence and resist the incroachments of the monarchy, when grasped by an overbearing minister and exercised under his direction, become the most dangerous implements in destroying the liberties of the people.

No inference can therefore be drawn from the powers of a House of Commons, *acting under the controul of a minister*, to a House of Commons, *acting in a state of constitutional independence*, struggling to support its own rights, and deliberating, in reality, on the propositions laid before it. Such a house might indeed maintain its due weight and importance in the state; it might be a check upon the extravagance, and an obstacle to the corruption of ministers; but there is no reason to presume that because it would be *unbought*, it would therefore be *unprincipled*; or that because it would be founded on the constitution, it would therefore destroy the constitution.

On the contrary, Sir, it appears to me, that

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the beneficial effects of such a measure, would be immediate and radical ; operating not only on the representatives of the people, as a collective body, but on the individual members.—You are of opinion, “ *that the same body of men as are now sent up to the national Senate, probably would, and certainly ought to be returned, under any extension or modification of the rights or freedom of Election.* ”—In this opinion I am compelled to differ from you ; and to believe, that the same men *probably would not, and certainly ought not*, to be returned by the people at large, under the free and independent exercise of their privileges.—What recommendation to an enlightened and impartial community, could many of them derive from their former conduct ? by which it would evidently appear, that their object in obtaining a seat, was not to serve their country, but to serve themselves ; and to sacrifice the rights and interests of the people, at the altar of their own ambition, avarice, and aggrandizement ? But even supposing the people should still retain their confidence in those who have already betrayed them, it is scarcely probable that the same persons would be very generally returned ; because, under a free and constitutional government, the same

persons would not offer themselves, as at present. Can you, Sir, or any one, suppose, that the present rage for a place in parliament, which, in many instances, falls little short of insanity, is always the result of a disinterested and generous desire to serve the country? or are not rank, and power, and emolument, much more stimulating motives? Let us, then, suppose, that these allurements were withdrawn; and that the occupation of a seat in parliament was declared to be incompatible with the holding of any office, place, or pension under the crown; and let us then ask, whether it is likely that the same persons as at present, would offer themselves as candidates for representatives of the people? or whether, on the contrary, there might not be some reason to expect, that those better days of the constitution would again return, when the difficulty lay, not in selecting a member from opposing candidates, but in prevailing upon any person to undertake so serious a charge?—Even the immense increase in the number of electors, would itself operate as an effectual prevention of that system of bribery and corruption, which has so long and so generally prevailed; whilst the short space of time allowed for taking the votes, would prove an

additional safeguard on the part of the people. The result of this would be, that the House of Commons would be restored to its proper and constitutional functions; and would no longer be liable to the imputations under which it now labours, of being subservient to the will of the minister for the time being; who may now be said to bring forward his measures with no other view, but to obtain such a sanction from parliament as may induce the people to acquiesce in them, under the idea that they are approved by their own representatives.

Were I to follow you in your further remarks on this head, I fear I should appear to be treading in a circle, and to combat objections, which I hope I have already refuted.—I cannot, however, omit to notice some other passages in your Letter.—“*Such,*” you observe, “*is the actual state of affairs in this country,*” “*and such are the aberrations from the direct*” “*line of its theory, which the course of events*” “*has produced in the British Government, that*” “*this apparently obvious right cannot now be*” “*conceded with prudence, or even with safety.*” “*The constitution has grown out of shape in its*” “*advances towards maturity, and to force it into*

“*symmetry by a sudden effort, would occasion nothing but fractures and dislocations.*”—I hope, and believe, that you are not aware of the tendency of these and similar remarks. Such language, if it can be allowed to have any meaning, is derogatory to the constitution, and an insult on the memory of those who framed it. The British constitution had grown up to maturity long before either you or I were born ; and had been found not only perfect in its parts, but effectual in its operation. To exhibit it, therefore, as a rickety bantling, which can no longer perform its natural functions, is to vilify and to decry it.—It is to represent it as no longer worthy of the veneration and attachment of Englishmen, and to endeavour to substitute *a new constitution*, or rather *a new scheme of despotic government* in its place.—Of the dangers to which our liberties may be exposed by the diffusion of such sentiments, you appear, however, not to entertain the slightest apprehensions.—your fears are all on the other side of the question.—If we may confide in your representations, no sooner would the House of Commons find itself released from the salutary restraints of *influence and corruption*, than, “*it would possess itself of the whole force of government,*

“ and find the other two estates wholly at its mercy.
 “ Violent incroachments would first be made on
 “ the acknowledged rights of the king and peers.
 “ These usurpations, as they could no longer be
 “ indirectly prevented, would be openly resisted.
 “ So new and so bold an assertion of right, un-
 “ attended by any effective strength, would never
 “ be endured. The other two estates would first
 “ be considered as intruders, and then voted use-
 “ less and detrimental to the state.”

These, and the long train of still more de-
 plorable consequences, which your imagination
 has suggested to you, appear to me not to have
 the slightest foundation, either in the experi-
 ence of past times, or in any rational conjecture
 of the future ; but to have been set forth for the
 purpose of deterring your readers from adopting
 any measures, which might interfere with your
 favourite system of *ministerial supremacy and
 parliamentary submission*. In case of a reform in
 Parliament, the representatives chosen by the
 people would probably partake of the spirit,
 and express the sentiments of the people ; and if
 there be any opinion more generally and
 more strongly impressed on the mind of the
 country than another, it is, that the present form

of their government, by king, lords and commons, is preferable to every other form of government; as being most consistent with the nature and situation of the British Empire, and with the genius and spirit of the people. How, then, can it be presumed, that a House of Commons, opposed by the crown, and the upper House of Parliament, without the controul of the military, and in opposition to the general and indisputable sense of the nation, could attempt an innovation, which is, *to destroy the constitution of the country*, and to erect upon its ruins *some new form of Government*, unknown to our ancestors?

You have cited Paley; and I scruple not to admit, that if his authority could avail you, he has spread an ample shield over you. His chapter on the British Constitution, is, like your Letter, neither more nor less than *an apology for corruption*; and his express protest “*against any construction, by which, what is there said, shall be attempted to be applied to the justification of bribery, or any clandestine reward or solicitation whatever,*” when coupled with his arguments for the necessity of *influence*, can only induce a smile. He, like you, foresees, in

the independence of the House of Commons, the probable destruction of the Constitution; and has even ventured to state "*that there is not more of paradox than of probability, in the apothegm, that an independent Parliament, is inconsistent with the Monarchy.*"—This, he, like you, has endeavoured to demonstrate, by a reference to the former periods of our history; and, as the conclusions he draws from it, may serve as a specimen of the mode of reasoning observable throughout this portion of his work, I will request your attention to the following extract, and to the few remarks, which I intend to subjoin to it.

"Some passages of our national history afford grounds for these apprehensions. Before the accession of James the first, or at least, during the reigns of his three immediate predecessors, the government of England was a *government by force*; that is, the King carried his measures in parliament *by intimidation*. A sense of personal danger, kept the members of the House of Commons in subjection. *A conjunction of fortunate causes* delivered, at last, the parliament and nation *from slavery*. That overbearing system, *which had declined in*

“ *the hands of James, expired early in the reign of*
 “ *his son.* After the restoration, there succeeded
 “ in its place, and since the revolution has
 “ been methodically pursued, THE MORE SUC-
 “ CESSFUL EXPEDIENT OF INFLUENCE. Now
 “ we remember what passed between the *loss of*
 “ *terror, and the establishment of influence.* The
 “ transactions of that interval, *whatever we may*
 “ *think of their occasion or effect,* no friend of
 “ regal government would wish to see revived.
 “ But the affairs of this kingdom afford a more
 “ recent attestation to the same doctrine.—In
 “ the British colonies of North America, the
 “ late assemblies possessed much of the power
 “ and constitution of our House of Commons.
 “ The king and government of Great Britain
 “ held *no patronage* in the country, *which could*
 “ *create attachment and influence* sufficient to
 “ counteract *that restless arrogating spirit,* which,
 “ in popular assemblies, when left to itself, *will*
 “ *never brook an authority that checks and in-*
 “ *terferes with its own.* To this cause, excited
 “ perhaps by some unseasonable provocations,
 “ we may attribute, as to their true and proper
 “ original, we will not say the misfortunes, but
 “ the changes that have taken place in the British
 “ empire. The admonition which such exam-

“ples suggest, will have its weight with those, who are content with *the general frame* of the English constitution; and who consider *stability* amongst the first perfections of any government.”

Principles of moral and political Philosophy,
p. 493, Ed. 1785.

Such are the historical proofs, and the only proofs, produced by this eminent writer, that, *an independent House of Commons is inconsistent with the monarchy.* We are first told, that, *in the interval, between the loss of terror and the establishment of influence, transactions took place that no friend of regal government would wish to see revived!* How cautious and distant is this insinuation! How little calculated to demonstrate the fact for which the passage is ostensibly introduced? The question is not, whether *in that interval, events took place, most deeply to be deplored,* as well by the friends of *the British constitution,* as by the friends of *regal government;* but whether these calamities are, *in truth and justice,* to be attributed to *the oppressive measures attempted to be enforced by the crown,* or, to *the arrogant assumptions and unjust pretensions of the people.* That the latter is the case, *the*

author himself has not dared to assert; and if the former be the fact, the statement proves *the very reverse of the purpose for which it is introduced*. Still more unfortunate, if possible, is this author in his second instance, for which he is obliged to resort to the assemblies of the Anglo-American states; a pretty strong proof that no apposite example could be furnished in this country. These assemblies, it seems, not being under the immediate operation of *influence*, resisted the attempts of the British government, to *impose a tax upon them without admitting them to a share in the representation*; or, in other words they refused to submit themselves and their posterity to the condition of *political slavery*; and this instance of *self defence* is denominated by this writer, “*a restless, and arrogating spirit, which, when left to itself, will never brook an authority that checks and interferes with its own!*” Yet these instances, in both of which *the restless and arrogating spirit* was displayed by the government, and not by the people, are adduced as proofs, that *an independent House of Commons would attempt to draw to itself the whole power of the state, and that the existence of such a House is incompatible with that of the Monarchy!*

When, therefore, such a writer as Dr. Paley has applied himself to make out a case from historical record, that shall prove his assumption, and fails so egregiously in his attempts, I must own I pay but little regard to the assertions contained either in his work, or your Letter, as to the *inability of the British constitution to support itself, unless it be assisted by the means of corruption and influence*; much less can I admit that either you, or any person, however high he may stand in rank or character, has a right, consistently either with historical fact or rational conjecture, to assert, or to insinuate, that the *Independence of the House of Commons would be the destruction of the Monarchy*. The Monarchy and the House of Commons have existed together for many centuries; and although it is acknowledged by Dr. Paley, as well as by yourself, that *the former has oppressed and controlled the latter*, in the early period of our history, *by violence and intimidation*, and in more modern times *by bribery and corruption*, I am as unable to discover, as either he or you are to point out, any instances, in which the representatives of the people have *given rise to a contest*, attempted to *infringe on the privileges*, or *commenced an attack*, upon the other constituent

parts of the legislature.—Dr. Paley has observed, “that the overbearing system which had “declined in the hands of James, *expired early* “*in the reign of his son.*” This is not a fair statement.—The fact is, that so far from relaxing in his pretensions, Charles I. attempted to carry this overbearing system to its utmost pitch, to impose taxes by his own prerogative, and to govern by force; and actually siezed upon and committed to prison those representatives of the people, who stood forwards to resist his claims. The contest therefore began with the tyrannical assumptions of the crown, which were not openly resisted, until, *after long forbearance*, and *in the just defence of the rights and liberties of the subject*; when it became evident that submission to such measures, must *entail an absolute despotism on the country*. With what pretence, then, can it be contended, that the spirit of a British House of Commons is a spirit of aggrandisement and incroachment, dangerous to the Crown, hostile to the House of Peers, and tending to the establishment of a pure democracy? But although no instance can be pointed out, in which a British House of Commons has commenced an attack upon the other two estates of the realm, the records of

these kingdoms afford a striking proof how fatal the effects of ministerial influence upon a corrupt and subservient House of Commons may be, to the rights, and even to the independence of a nation. The example of Ireland alone ought to serve as a perpetual beacon to Englishmen, to warn them, that with a *corrupt House of Commons*, chosen by a small proportion of the population, and without sympathy with the great mass of the people, there is no extreme of humiliation which they may not justly dread.

It is not, I assure you, without real concern, that I perceive that the degraded state to which the constitution of these realms is reduced, should have been contemplated by you, not only without regret, but should, throughout your whole letter, have been the frequent subject of your panegyric. In page 32, you observe, " In this way the three estates of the
 " realm have created to themselves a series of
 " checks and balances, unknown to the letter
 " of the constitution, and foreign to its spirit.
 " That spirit undoubtedly is direct and independent; disdainful of all sinister artifices and
 " pious frauds. It recognizes no covert proceedings, and permits no amalgamation of its

“ component parts. But this fair fabric, with
 “ all its perfection, must have gone speedily to
 “ decay, if THE NEW EXPEDIENTS had not saved
 “ it from falling. These have restored its strength
 “ and equilibrium, though at the expence of its
 “ beauty and symmetry. They have even en-
 “ abled the government to attain its object more
 “ effectually than before, though by a more cir-
 “ cuitous route. It may, I think, be asserted,
 “ that at no period since the conquest, have the
 “ monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, of
 “ which the British constitution is compounded,
 “ so well preserved their due equipoise, as during
 “ the present reign.”

Not satisfied, however, with this *due equi-
 poise*, by which it seems the government attains
 its object *more effectually than before*, you fur-
 ther inform us, that “ this beautiful system,
 “ which Cicero only imagined, which Tacitus
 “ admired in its embryo, and Montesquieu ex-
 “ tolled in its maturity, as the perfection of
 “ human contrivance in the art of governing
 “ nations, was not produced by the wisdom and
 “ learning of colleges or councils, or by any
 “ single effort of individual or collective ability.
 “ It grew up with the growing intelligence of

“ successive ages, and the happy circumstances
 “ and spirit of this favoured nation. We have
 “ passed through the *loca senta situ noctemque*
 “ *profundam* of ignorance, superstition, and
 “ tyranny, to an eminence, very remote indeed
 “ from that degree of perfection in government
 “ which is conciveable, and perhaps attainable ;
 “ but yet, by the concurrent voice of the ablest
 “ men, we have reached *the farthest point which*
 “ *has ever been approached, in that most impor-*
 “ *tant of all arts.*”

Now, Sir, may I be allowed to ask, what we
 are to understand by the foregoing encomium ?
 What was the beautiful object that struck the
 imagination of Cicero, which Tacitus admired in
 its embryo, and which Montesquieu extolled in
 its maturity ? Was it such a system as you have
 presented to us ; in which one of the component
 parts of the constitution has, by means of *influ-*
ence and corruption, obtained the decided con-
 trol of the others ? by which it can carry through
 the most dangerous or oppressive measures, *not*
only without resistance, but with the presumed as-
sent of the people ? Or was it not a form of go-
 vernment like that of the British Constitution
 in its original perfection, in which the three

Estates, *acting independently of each other*, produce that happy result, which we have so long been taught to admire? The opinion of Montesquieu, the only one of those three eminent men who could give a specific opinion on the subject, is decisive; and proves, that the situation which you have described as the present condition of the government, this *union of the three estates*, this *amalgamation of the government into one*, was considered by him as the complete overthrow of the liberties of a people.—I give you his own words—“ *Lorsque dans la*
 “ *même personne, ou dans le même corps de ma-*
 “ *gistrature, la puissance législative est réunie à*
 “ *la puissance exécutive, il n’y a point de liberté;*
 “ *parce qu’on peut craindre que le même mo-*
 “ *narque, ou le même sénat, ne fasse des loix*
 “ *tyranniques, pour les exécuter tyranniquement.*”

Esprit. des Loix, liv. x. c. 6.

That I may not be supposed to have attributed to you, sentiments which you do not, in fact, entertain, I will recal to your recollection some passages in your letter, in which your statement of this alarming change in the constitution, and your approbation of such change, are evident and connected.—“ Un-

“doubtedly,” you say, “the indirect power
 “of the crown was very considerable before
 “that period, (the revolution) for the sources
 “of *influence* were then open, though bearing
 “no proportion, either in strength or num-
 “ber, to those which exist at present. But
 “the necessity of employing this GREAT STATE
 “ENGINE in the ordinary routine of affairs, seems
 “to have been first perceived after the new set-
 “tlement. **POWER ONLY DESCENDS TO COR-**
 “**RUPT, WHEN IT CAN NO LONGER INTIMIDATE.**
 “—On this principle alone, can be explained
 “the paradox, which has given rise to so much
 “controversy, **THAT OUR CORRUPTION IS A**
 “**PROOF OF OUR FREEDOM.** Those who endea-
 “vour to pervert our choice, acknowledge by
 “the attempt, that our choice is free.” (p. 33.)
 “By keeping the collision of the three estates
 “*out of sight*, and by *carrying on their contests*
 “*under ground*, a degree of *smoothness and or-*
 “*der* is spread over the aspect of government,
 “quite unknown in the early periods of our
 “history.” (p. 34.) “By a sort of usage which
 “is growing fast into prescription, almost all
 “the important business of the nation is com-
 “mitted to the Lower House, of which the acts
 “pass the other two Estates *almost as smoothly as*

“ *the Edicts of Louis XIV. were registered by the*
 “ *Parliament of Paris; The minister of the crown*
 “ *cannot even attempt to carry on the business of*
 “ *the nation without an assured majority in the*
 “ *Commons.*” (p. 45.) “ *Such is the elevated*
 “ *rank in the scale of nations to which we have*
 “ *actually arrived, &c.*” (p. 62.) “ *That we have*
 “ *actually attained this enviable superiority is ge-*
 “ *nerally agreed; and it is also agreed that we*
 “ *have attained it by a happy intermixture, and*
 “ *a skilful counterpoise, of the three forms of go-*
 “ *vernment which have commonly prevailed among*
 “ *nations.*” (p. 63.) Can we refrain from asking,
 what is become of this counterpoise, if the mi-
 nister of the crown cannot carry on the business
 of the nation, without *an assured majority in*
the House of Commons?

I know that nothing is more common with
 the political writers of the day, than to extol in
 extravagant terms, the British constitution, as
 the perfection of human wisdom; but at the
 same time to insinuate, that however beautiful
 it may be *in theory*, it *cannot exist in practice*;
 and that to restore it to its former energies, *would*
plunge the country into commotion and ruin.
 By these proceedings its adversaries shelter them-

selves under its name and authority, whilst they are, in fact, aiming only at its destruction.—In order to conceal their attempts, every shape is assumed, and every subterfuge employed, to the verge, and even beyond the verge of contradiction. I am sorry to observe that so many instances of this practice occur in your letter. We are there told that “the peculiar excellence of the British constitution, is understood by the best writers, English and foreign, to consist in such a distinction of power among the three estates of the realm, as preserves among them *a due equilibrium*, and secures each from the incroachment of others.” But this equilibrium can, it seems, now no longer resist the preponderating power of the minister, and we are therefore informed that “by mixing the forms of government together *in a sort of balanced union*, we have secured the benefits of each.” That three distinct bodies may counterpoise each other, or preserve an equilibrium, we can indeed easily conceive; but how those bodies when once united, can be balanced against each other, is not within the limits of a common comprehension. If formed into one mass, they must undoubtedly obey the same impulse, and follow the same direction.

That you consider this as the present state of the government, is abundantly manifest from many passages in your letter. Why, then, are we to be amused with eulogies on a constitution which no longer exists!—when “a new order of things has grown up among us, which has gradually settled itself into a habit, and mixed itself with all the minute ramifications of our policy,” and when you have yourself employed several pages, to shew the unhappy consequences that must ensue “from any sudden attempt to force the actual practice of government to quadrate with its perfect theory?”

But although it is only in the present day, that the practice of ministerial corruption in the House of Commons has been openly recognized and vindicated, *as a new and improved system of the British Constitution*, the possibility of such an event has not escaped the notice of those, who have undertaken to trace the history of our political institutions, and to shew the dangers to which they are liable. In fact, the subject of our present discussion, is that, which has, in every period of our history, given rise to those struggles between the crown and the people, which, when carried to extre-

mities, have always terminated in a complete triumph to the cause of freedom. Under the constitution of these realms, the rights of the people can never be lost, but by the corruption and subserviency of the House of Commons; and hence, all the measures that can be supposed to influence the representatives, either as a collective body, or in their individual capacities, have been incessantly employed. But neither the sanguinary despotism of Henry VIII, the slavish sophistry of James I, the exemplification of his paternal maxims by Charles I, nor the mean and abject artifices of Charles II. and James II. could extinguish the native spirit of the country; and two revolutions, and the expulsion of the reigning family, attest the hereditary spirit of the British nation, and the danger which must always be incurred by similar attempts. To suppose, therefore, that this system of ministerial corruption, which you have represented as *so manifest an improvement in the government of the Country*, is new to the observation of the people, is a mistake.—The attempt has been carried on for ages; and the only novelty is, that instead of being considered as *an abuse*, it should now be denominated *an improvement*, that instead of being viewed as *the extinc-*

tion of our liberties, it should be commended as
the increase of our power, that instead of being
regarded as the worst kind of despotism, it should
 be denominated a *new and improved constitution*
of Great Britain! “There is surely but too much
 “reason to suspect,” says Lord Bolingbroke,
 in his almost prophetic dissertation on Parties,
 “that the enemies of our constitution may *at-*
 “*tempt hereafter to govern by corruption*, when
 “it is pleaded for, and recommended as a
 “necessary expedient of government, by some
 “men of all ranks and orders; not only by
 “professed hirelings, who write that they may
 “eat, but by men who have talked and writ-
 “ten themselves already out of their native
 “obscurity and penury, by affecting zeal in the
 “cause of liberty; not only by such as these,
 “but by men whose birth, education, and for-
 “tune, aggravate their crime and their folly;
 “by men whom honour at least should restrain
 “from favouring so *dishonourable a cause*; and
 “by men whose peculiar obligations to preach
 “up morality, should restrain them, at least,
 “from being the preachers of *an immorality*
 “*above all others abominable in its nature, and*
 “*pernicious in its effects*. These men are ready,
 “I know, to tell us, that *the influence they*

“ *plead for* is necessary to *strengthen the hands*
 “ *of those who govern* ; that corruption serves
 “ *to oil the wheels of government, and to ren-*
 “ *der the administration more smooth and easy.*
 “ —Absurd and wicked triflers ! According
 “ to them, our excellent constitution is no
 “ better than a jumble of incompatible powers,
 “ which would separate and fall to pieces of
 “ themselves, unless restrained and upheld by
 “ such honourable methods as those of *bribery*
 “ *and corruption* !—They would prove that the
 “ form of our government is defective to a degree
 “ of ridiculousness ; but the ridicule as well as
 “ the iniquity is their own.”

Whether the doctrines reprobated in the
 foregoing passages are similar to those asserted
 in your letter, I leave to yourself and your
 readers, to judge ; not, however, without re-
 commending to your serious perusal, the fol-
 lowing striking observations of the same author.
 “ To destroy British liberty with an army of
 “ Britons, is not a measure so sure of success
 “ as some people may believe. *To corrupt the*
 “ *parliament* is a slower, but might prove a more
 “ effectual method ; and *two or three hundred*
 “ *mercenaries in the two houses*, if they could be

“ listed there, would be more fatal to the con-
 “ stitution, than ten times as many thousands,
 “ in red and in blue, out of them. Parliaments
 “ are the true guardians of liberty. For this
 “ principally they were instituted; and this is
 “ the principal article of that great and noble
 “ trust, which the collective body of the people
 “ of Britain reposes in the representative. *But*
 “ *then no slavery can be so effectually brought*
 “ *and fixed upon us, as parliamentary slavery.*
 “ By the corruption of parliament, and the ab-
 “ solute influence of a king or his minister on
 “ the two houses, *we return into that state, to de-*
 “ *liver or secure us from which, parliaments were*
 “ *instituted, and are really governed by the*
 “ *arbitrary will of one man.* Our whole con-
 “ stitution is at once dissolved. Many securities
 “ to liberty are provided, but the integrity which
 “ depends on the freedom and the indepen-
 “ dency of parliament, is the key stone that
 “ keeps the whole together. If this be shaken,
 “ our constitution totters—If it be quite re-
 “ moved, our constitution falls into ruin. That
 “ noble fabric, the pride of Britain, the envy
 “ of her neighbours, raised by the labour of so
 “ many centuries, repaired at the expence of
 “ so many millions, and cemented by such a

“ profusion of blood—that noble fabric, I say,
 “ which was able to resist the united efforts of
 “ so many races of giants, may be demolished
 “ by a race of pigmies. No Agamemnon, no
 “ Achilles will be wanted to take our city.
 “ *Thersites* himself will be sufficient for such a
 “ contest.” Even the manner in which this
 total alteration, this entire destruction of our
 constitution is most likely to be attempted,
 is pointedly indicated by the same writer—
 “ The single reign of Henry VIII.” says he,
 “ will serve to shew, that no tyranny can be
 “ more severe, than that which is exercised *by*
 “ *a concert with parliament*; that arbitrary will
 “ may be made the sole rule of government,
 “ even whilst the names and forms of a free
 “ constitution are preserved; that for a prince,
 “ or his minister, to become our tyrant, there is
 “ no need to abolish parliaments; there is no
 “ need that he who is master of one part of the
 “ legislature should endeavour to abolish the
 “ other two, *when he can use, upon every oc-*
 “ *casione, the united strength of the whole*;
 “ there is no need he should be a tyrant in the
 “ gross, when he can be so in detail; nor *in*
 “ *name*, when he can be so *in effect*.—That for
 “ parliaments to establish tyranny, there is

“ no need, therefore, to repeal *Magna Charta*,
 “ or any other of the great supports of our
 “ liberty.—*It is enough if they put themselves,*
 “ *corruptly and servilely, under the influence of*
 “ *such a prince or such a minister.* On the whole,
 “ I conclude, that in the possible case here sup-
 “ posed, the first and principal object will be,
 “ **TO DESTROY THE CONSTITUTION, UNDER PRE-**
 “ **TENCE OF PRESERVING THE GOVERNMENT,**
 “ **BY CORRUPTING OUR PARLIAMENTS.** I am
 “ the better founded in concluding that this
 “ may happen in some future age, by what we
 “ may observe in our own.” When such is the
 language of a nobleman, too justly accused of
 high tory principles and a predilection for arbi-
 trary power, how must we blush for those pre-
 tended friends of liberty, who are not ashamed
 to avow and to defend, that change which he had
 so strongly condemned, and so distinctly fore-
 seen !

As you proceed in your remarks your difficul-
 ties increase ; as must ever be the case with
 those who expect that temporizing expedients
 can compensate for the want of great leading
 principles. Although you profess to admire the
 constitution, as it at present exists, as well in

spirit as practice, as having “ secured the benefits of the three forms of government which have chiefly prevailed among mankind, and by mixing them together in a sort of *balanced union*, secured the benefits of each, and excluded their faults in a greater degree than was ever thought possible” (p. 62.)—Although your principal object is to show, “ that in the path to political perfection we have already reached such an advanced post that it is far more incumbent on us to be intent on securing the ground we have gained, than on making fresh acquisitions,” (p. 59.) yet you appear, on a review, to have been shocked at the picture of despotism you have yourself drawn, and at the consequences to which such a system must inevitably lead. These considerations have induced you to think, that “ some alterations in *our system of election* are *exceedingly desirable*,” (p. 57.) and that “ the number of placemen in the lower House is become evidently too great.” On this account “ you do not know that any better remedy can be applied than that proposed by Mr. Brougham,” (p. 56.) and that “ to diminish the number of placemen in the House of Commons is the most obvious means of reducing the influence of the ex-

“ ecutive power, and perhaps the most practi-
 “ cable ;” that “ the subsequent propositions
 “ of Mr. Brougham are also unobjectionable,
 “ though their objects are less pressing, and
 “ perhaps less attainable ;” that “ without ex-
 “ pecting from such changes much improvement
 “ in the constituting, or constituted masses, of
 “ the House of Commons,” yet, you think these
 reforms “ ought to be attempted, if it were only
 “ for this reason, that they have been *so long*
 “ *and so loudly demanded* ; that the voice of the
 “ people ought never to be disregarded except
 “ when it is in the most direct opposition to
 “ their interests ; that the **GROSS DEFECTS IN**
 “ **OUR REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM,** will always
 “ supply a plausible ground of complaint to *the*
 “ *discontented*, and a fertile theme of argument
 “ and invective to *the ingenious*, while even to
 “ the *most considerate* it exhibits a spectacle,
 “ which cannot be viewed without *some dis-*
 “ *gust and aversion.*” That “ it is, on the other
 “ hand, highly expedient to take the delicate
 “ task of reform out of the hands of **DESPERATE**
 “ **AND THOUGHTLESS SPECULATORS,** who, *by*
 “ *some unforeseen chance of events*, may hereafter
 “ acquire the power of setting about the work in
 “ their own way.” On these considerations,

you think “ the *projects* of Mr. Brougham ought “ to be attempted, with as much expedition as “ is consistent with the purposes for which they “ are undertaken.” (p. 57.)

Whether these explicit admissions of the *expediency* of a reform, as well in the choice of the national representatives, as in the exclusion of placemen from the House of Commons, be perfectly consistent with the opinions you entertain of the present practical excellence of the constitution, I shall not stop to enquire; but I apprehend they will occasion *you* to be classed with the most prominent advocates for a reform; and as the objections of those in power are not so much against the specific nature of such a reform, as against all reform whatever, so I greatly fear that by the long train of ministerial dependents, you may be considered as one of those **DESPERATE AND THOUGHTLESS SPECULATORS** who are not fit to be intrusted with so delicate a task. For my own part, however, I confess I see but little reason for these imputations. In preferring the detailed plan of Mr. Brougham to the more direct measures which I have proposed— You conceive you have discovered a difference between them, which, whether it exists or not in

reality, has led you to such preference. You admit that the extension of the elective suffrage to “ every master of a family, not in a state of absolute dependence, and who is so far removed from abject poverty, as to be able to pay annual taxes, is a measure which seems consonant to the plainest dictates of justice and equity.— That such a plan is “ quite commensurate to its objects ;” that “ it strikes at the root of almost all the existing evils, and appears to concur with the original design of those who first meditated the British constitution.” *This plan you reject.* On the other hand, you have already informed us, “ that a national assembly which represents the whole population, and commands the entire property of a country, will assuredly acquire any degree of power which it chuses to possess ;” that “ such a body requires some other control than its own intrinsic wisdom and moderation ;” and finally, “ that an independent House of Commons, in its present plenitude of power, is not compatible with the integrity of the British constitution ;” and *upon these grounds you prefer the measures proposed by Mr. Brougham.*

Whether those measures might, if carried into execution, be as effectual in the result as the more direct measure of a general representation of the people, it is not necessary to enquire; It is sufficient to observe, that you suppose there is an essential difference between them; and this difference evidently consists in the presumed *compatibility* of those of Mr. Brougham, with the *authority and influence so necessary to be exercised by ministers over the deliberations and decisions of the House of Commons*; whilst a general and impartial representation of the people would, in your apprehension, render the House of Commons *too independent*, and thereby *endanger the other branches of the constitution*. In plain terms, then, you prefer the system of Mr. Brougham, because you think it would not, if carried into effect, put an end to that *ministerial influence and corruption*, which are now become so indispensably necessary; whilst, at the same time, it might be sufficient *to silence those who so loudly demand a reform, to deprive the discontented of a plausible ground of complaint, to baffle the ingenious, and to take this delicate task out of the hands of desperate and thoughtless speculators*. But to render the House of Commons the fair representation of a free

and independent people; to enable them *effectually* to resist the aggressions of power, and mark with due reprobation the misconduct and the crimes of ministers; to place them beyond the possibility of corruption, and to restore in practice that constitution of which you are so liberal in your encomiums, *these are not the objects which you have in view.*—With such a reform, we are told, “no steady system of measures could be pursued;” that “when the government has more need than ever of an accelerated motion, it would find itself clogged with all the weights of an unwieldy democracy.” In short, you have devoted some pages, to demonstrate the dreadful consequences which would, in all probability, arise from the independence of the House of Commons on the direct and immediate control of the minister.

In this dilemma, it is impossible you can close your eyes to the conclusions that follow. Either the minister must be all powerful, and be able to command a majority; or, the House of Commons must, in the true spirit of the constitution, be independent. To presume, in the first case, that the House of Com-

mons can take up distinctions on the measures proposed by ministers, that they can *suffer such as are good to pass*, and oppose *such as are injurious*, is frivolous. They must either be an implement of despotism for the crown, or a shield of defence for the people; they must either be freemen or slaves; they must either control (as far as their share in the constitution extends) or they must obey. The ministers of the crown must either be allowed to carry on, at their own pleasure, long and ruinous wars, to engage in desperate expeditions, to screen from justice illustrious delinquents, and to apportion the revenues of the state among their supporters and dependents, or they must be controlled by the free and independent interference of that assembly, whose peculiar province it is, to guard the rights and watch over the interests of the people. Between these systems there is no medium; and if the measures recommended by Mr. Brougham would not correct these abuses, it may safely be pronounced respecting them, that they would do more harm than good.

But whatever might be the actual result of such measures, whether as you think they might be adopted without impeding the wheels of go-

vernment, or, in other words, without reforming that system of corruption which is stated by you as being now necessary to our existence as a nation, or whether they would effectually restore the British constitution to its original energy, I shall not attempt to divine ; but of this I am fully convinced, that their very able and judicious author conceived them, at the time he proposed them, to be fully commensurate to that great object ; and that had it not been with this expectation, he would not have limited his views within that circle. In this, then, you, Sir, who approve of the measures, and he who first proposed them, are, in your motives, at perfect variance. He is of opinion that by carrying his measures into effect, the authority of the crown would be reduced within its constitutional limits, and the House of Commons rendered independent ; whilst you, on the contrary, suppose, that the adoption of such measures would not be incompatible with the predominating and necessary influence of ministers in the House of Commons ; although it might take away *all pretext for dissatisfaction and censure from without*. These motives are *so distinct from each other*, and at the same time *so evident*, that I can by no means consider you and him as engaged in one

common cause. On the contrary, he is the advocate for the independence, you, for the ministerial control of parliament. He conceives that his propositions would, if carried into practice, enable the representatives of the people to exercise their constitutional privileges, and rescue the country from that corruption, which, when it commences in parliament, cannot fail to infect all the ranks and orders of the community. You think that the measures he recommends would produce no such effect; that they would neither impede the wheels of government, nor prevent the minister from exercising *that paramount authority*, without which, according to your new system, the national business could not now be conducted. Your idea of the *perfect safety* of these measures is therefore founded on your conviction of their *perfect inefficacy*. Under your favorite system, the minister might still find means to influence a House of Representatives, chosen by a select, and as to number, an inconsiderable body of the people; whilst some additional security may be derived to his authority by silencing the voice of remonstrance, and affording him an opportunity of contending that all the reasonable demands of the people had been fully complied with, and that they who

would insist on the necessity of further measures, were not merely *desperate and thoughtless speculators*, but *traitors to their king and enemies to their country*.

The consequences of this statement are as singular as they are unquestionable. As far as your individual authority can be of any avail, and I assure you that on this occasion I do not wish to depreciate it, you have incontrovertibly admitted the inefficacy of the plan of which you appear as the advocate, and the expediency of that which you reject. To suppose that you would allow of the propriety of any measures, which would, in fact, impede the progress or obstruct the operations of that GREAT STATE ENGINE, which *cannot be worked by the minister without an assured majority in the House of Commons*, would either be to charge you with a most gross and palpable inconsistency, or to represent you as intentionally hostile to what you conceive to be the real interests of your country. It is not my wish to impute to you either the one or the other of these alternatives; but I cannot allow you to stand before the public as the avowed friend of reform, and to associate your cause with that of the chief patrons and advocates of

liberty, whilst it is evident, beyond all contradiction, that your intention is to dig pit-falls before her steps ; and instead of uniting with a people anxious to preserve those liberties which their fathers have handed down to them, are occupied only in throwing dust in their eyes.

Amidst the apprehensions you entertain for the fate of *the new and improved system of government*, in case the House of Commons should ever acquire its constitutional independence, there is one circumstance which seems to afford you great consolation, and which is, that *you think the attempt itself impracticable*. You have even gone so far as to state, with some degree of inconsistency with your former admissions, that “ you consider the immediate mode “ by which the proposed alterations are to be “ carried into effect, as itself their most objectionable feature,” and that “ the means are “ not less perilous than the instruments are “ inadequate.” To demonstrate these opinions, you have entered upon an enquiry into the nature of the different political parties into which the nation is now divided. The first of these, are what you have called the *Tories*, comprehending all the partizans of the late Mr. Pitt,

as well as of all the subsequent administrations, “ which have professed to act on his system of “ policy.” This party, you suspect, “ *includes* “ *in itself a majority of all the house-keepers in* “ *Great Britain, who pay annual taxes ;*” and of this formidable body, you think the cause of reform will meet, not only with “ the negative “ concurrence,” but with “ the active and per- “ severing hostility.” In the next place, you think “ it would not receive any very extensive “ encouragement from that party who call them- “ selves the *Whigs,*” who, you inform us, “ have “ never scrupled to vary their conduct, in order “ to preserve the consistency of their principles ; “ who have always taken the alarm, when the “ balance seemed to incline too much to the “ popular side, and have even thrown their “ weight into the opposite scale.” That “ this “ numerous body, powerful and respectable from “ their rank, their wealth, their talents, and their “ patriotism, would never be brought to favour “ any scheme, which embraced *universal suf-* “ *frage,* under any *modification.*” There re- mains, then, it seems, only another party, who, you observe, “ are found in every country, and “ are co-existent with every form of govern- “ ment ; but who have of late years been called

“ **BURDETTITES**, from the name of that distin-
 “ guished person who has been placed at their
 “ head, by general consent.” These people,
 you describe as “ spread through every class of
 “ society, but chiefly to be found, perhaps, in
 “ that order which is immediately above the
 “ lowest.” Of these men, you candidly admit,
 though with some exceptions, “ the general pu-
 “ rity of their motives, and the unaffected ardour
 “ of their patriotism ;” but you add, “ though
 “ they are formidable by their strength, and con-
 “ siderable by their numbers, you think the na-
 “ ture of man, and the eternal course of human
 “ affairs must change, before they can ever rise
 “ to the direction of public opinion.” That
 “ the present structure of civilized society must
 “ be demolished, before they can ascend with
 “ safety to the government of nations ;” and that
 “ **TO DO EVERY THING FOR THE PEOPLE, BUT**
 “ **NOTHING BY THEM,** is one of the hard neces-
 “ sities of human nature, but “ *one of the most*
 “ *essential rules of political conduct.*” (p. 51.)

Such, then, being the hopeless condition in
 which the cause of reform at present stands,
 furnished only with “ inadequate instruments,”
 and attempting to effect that, which is *contrary*

to the nature of man, and the eternal course of human affairs, I should have presumed that you, and the other admirers of *things as they are*, might have been perfectly at ease, and relying on the general aversion of the great body of the nation against reform, might, instead of condescending to refute the arguments of its promoters, have treated them with silent contempt. As we proceed, however, in your letter, we find these impossibilities are not so absolute, as not to admit of a supposition that the party last mentioned, may, perhaps, “by a consent of opinion so universal, and so strongly manifested as to become irresistible, carry some important point.” Here again your apprehensions commence, and you have indulged them to an extent which seems to have terrified yourself, and will probably terrify your readers. All the dangers that can possibly arise from the effects of an unrestrained and violent movement of the popular mind, “committing in its devious and unrelenting march, the most alarming devastations,” are dwelt on with a degree of energy proportionate to the subject; and in conclusion we are told, that “the force of popular will, like the elemental powers of fire and water, is of excellent use when kept

“ under due control, but, like them, is of tremendous potency when it once becomes our master.”

In these extremes of hope and of fear, these conflicts of possibility and impossibility, this *absolute certainty* that the system of corruption is impregnable, and this *dread* of the horrible consequences that must ensue from its overthrow, there appears to me to be, if not some degree of contradiction, at least no small share of exaggeration. A few plain observations may, perhaps, relieve your anxiety, and place this subject in a less alarming light. That there are some persons, who may yet persevere in approving the system introduced by Mr. Pitt, and continued by his immediate political disciples, I shall not deny; and that these persons are as properly designated by the name of *Tories* as by any other political appellation, may also be admitted—But I apprehend, that whatever might have been the fact during the life time of that most unfortunate, but popular minister, there is no reason to believe that his admirers *now* compose a majority of all the housekeepers in Great Britain who pay annual taxes. On this great body, “ *existing circumstances,*” and “ *the*

“*evidence of facts,*” have worked a wonderful change. The calamities of the country are too severe, and the causes to which they may be traced too apparent, not to be distinctly perceived and generally acknowledged. I conceive, therefore, that the number of those who admire the policy of Mr. Pitt, is daily and rapidly diminishing; and am inclined to believe, that the cause of reform would experience a more effectual opposition from those whom you have denominated *Whigs*, than it would from the adherents to the old system of passive obedience. It was to them, that, at no very distant period, the country looked up as to its guardians and its hope. For a long series of years, the independence of parliament and the cause of constitutional reform, were the characteristic of their order, and the bond of their union.—At one period, this cause seemed to unite almost all the talents and virtue of the country. Mr. Pitt set the example of apostacy; his success was too great not to attract admirers; and the dereliction, from time to time, of many of the warmest friends to reform, has proved but too fully, that the disinterested spirit of patriotism cannot always resist the allurements of place and of power. It is, therefore, too

true, that many of those whom you have denominated *Whigs*, are hostile to any measures which might extend the elective franchise to the great body of the people; and that some of them are become even adverse to any reform whatever. The result of this has been highly unfavourable; and the cause has suffered more from the desertion of its friends, than from the open opposition of its adversaries. Public confidence in men of high rank, and eminent personal worth, is not, nor ought it to be, easily shaken. Plausible, and to many, perhaps, satisfactory motives, may be assigned for a change of political conduct. The circumstances of the times, the difficulty of the attempt, and above all, the danger of innovation, are alleged, as not only sufficient, but irresistible reasons. Thus the cause of reform has not only to lament the loss of many able and powerful friends, but receives a two-fold injury. Her warmest admirers have deserted her; and have thereby cast an imputation on her, which no purity of principle, no caution in conduct, can effectually remove. But if the cause of reform has suffered, those who have deserted it, have been no gainers. By a false estimate of the good sense and good intentions of the nation, they have rebuked and

discountenanced that strong and virtuous popular feeling, which they had themselves excited; and which naturally turned to them for its direction and encouragement. Of this, they were the legitimate patrons; and it was, certainly, not without the most painful regret, that the people found themselves obliged to look out for other channels, through which to express what they so justly felt. Their experience might have guided, their prudence might have restrained, their interposition might have purified the stream of public opinion, if at any time it had become too turbid or too impetuous. But these hopes have not been realized; and an arrangement has recently been made in the administration of the country, by which these distinguished characters have been excluded from any participation in the government, at a crisis of the greatest difficulty, without a voice being raised in their favour, or the expression of a single sentiment of regret, on the part of the people. Eminent as they are, for their rank, their talents, and their high connections, experienced in the affairs of government, and sincerely feeling for the honour and interests of the country, they now find their efforts paralyzed, their good intentions frustrated, and the government consigned to the hands of

ministers, from whose misconduct they cannot but anticipate the most alarming consequences. Thus they stand, alone and unsupported; nor is it, I admit, easy to perceive, in what manner the country can avail itself of their abilities or their services, whilst they persevere in a course of conduct so directly opposite to that which first raised them to the distinguished eminence which they so long enjoyed.

To your assertion that the third party, whom you have denominated *Burdettites*, are “found in every country,” and are co-existent with “every government,” I cannot assent. They are only to be found in countries where freedom has been enjoyed and understood, and are, in fact, peculiar to these kingdoms. They are more properly designated by the name of *The friends of British constitutional liberty*, than by any appellation derived from that of an individual. It is to their fidelity and efforts, that the nation is indebted for what yet remains of its constitution; and it is to them that even their political opponents will owe their preservation, if, in spite of themselves, they can yet be preserved from arbitrary power. Nor are they confined to *that class of society immediately above the lowest.*

They may not, indeed, for obvious reasons, be found in great numbers in either House of Parliament; but in the nation at large they are as respectable in their character, and as distinguished by their talents, as any other class of the community. Their object is not “to destroy “the present structure of civilized society,” or, “to ascend to the government of nations.”— Their wish is, *to preserve the constitution of their ancestors, and to enjoy in freedom and peace, the fruits of their own industry.* Yet these are the persons, for whom, you tell us, “*every thing ought to be done by their rulers, but nothing by themselves!*” a sentiment fit only to be avowed under the present despotic government of France; and which, in the true spirit of slavery, considers the rulers *as a superior order of beings to the people at large.*

These observations scarcely require a comment. The truth is, *there are only two parties in the Country.* Those who support the present corrupt system, and those who wish for a constitutional and effectual reform. Between these there are, undoubtedly, many shades and modifications of opinion, and no small portion of an inert and neutral mass, always ready to pre-

ponderate with the prevailing body. The true friends to their country are neither *Tories*, nor *Whigs*, nor *Burdettites*. They are *Englishmen*, wishing to enjoy the privileges and the constitution of their ancestors. If they choose to speak, their voice must be heard. If they keep an ignominious silence, the triumph of their adversaries is complete. The system of corruption is now no longer concealed; and they who can contemplate it without disgust, and without opposition, deserve the fate that awaits them. Nor will their indolence, or their pusillanimity, secure them from those troubles and misfortunes which they dread. It is in the very nature of arbitrary power, to grow more insolent by submission; and there is an extreme of oppression to which it is impossible to submit. To avert this calamity, I know of no means so proper as a constant and firm resistance to the incroachments of power; manifested and expressed in the general will of a rational and enlightened people. On such an occasion, our best remedy will be found in resorting to the constitution of our country; which, like the brazen serpent of Moses, will be found adequate to restore us to health and to safety, if we have but the courage to look up to it.

To our considerate and cautious ancestors, the necessity of maintaining the dignity, and providing for the independence of Parliament, was no subject of dispute; nor had they any doubts as to the dangerous consequences that must result from a House of Commons, acting, either pusillanimously or corruptly, under the immediate influence of the minister. The proof of this is to be found in the numerous statutes, intended to secure the freedom of election, and to prevent the ministers of the crown from being at the same time the representatives of the people. Whether we are right, who attempt to tread in their steps, or whether that system of corruption against which they struggled so long, must now be adopted as the constitution of the country, is the question.—This question you have stated, fully and fairly; whether prematurely or not, I will not presume to decide. Probably, the longer the discussion could have been postponed, and the better for the friends of corruption, as their NEW SYSTEM is every day intrenching itself. On this account I fear you will scarcely be thought entitled to the thanks of those, who are “*keeping the collision of the three estates out of sight,*” and “*carrying on their contests under ground;*”

“with a degree of smoothness and order unknown in the early periods of our history.” Happily, however, the friends of British freedom are not insensible to the dangers of their situation. Their object is the restoration of the constitution of their country, and the rescuing the people from the evils and the disgrace of ministerial corruption. The measures proposed to be resorted to, are also in strict unison both with the *spirit* and the *letter* of that constitution; such as have been approved by the wisest and best men this country has produced, and are now strongly recommended by the most urgent necessity.—These are the *extension of the elective franchise to ALL those, who, as house-holders, paying direct taxes to government, are equally entitled to it; and the exclusion of placemen and pensioners from a seat in the House of Commons.* In adverting to these, you have thought proper to enter into a long discussion to shew the inexpediency of conducting elections *by ballot*; a proposition not to be found in the letter which you profess to answer. What I have proposed, or to speak more correctly, what many others have proposed, and I have only undertaken to recommend and inforce, is strictly within the pale of the British constitution, com-

prized within its definition, essential to its existence, and cannot be neglected or deferred, without a total surrender of British freedom. It is as remote from the wild *theories of republicanism*, on the one hand, as from *the degrading system of ministerial corruption* on the other; and if it be strictly adhered to, will bear us, as it has often borne our ancestors, through storms and dangers, to honour, safety, and peace.

I have now only to beg you to be assured, that the difference of opinion which appears to subsist between us on questions of a public nature, will by no means diminish those sentiments of individual and personal regard, with which I remain,

Sir,

Your very faithful Servant,

W. R.

The first of these is the fact that the
the following is a list of the names of the
persons who have been named in the
above mentioned articles. It is to be
understood that the names of the
persons who have been named in the
above mentioned articles are not to be
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Roscoe Answer to Mr. Merritt

Liverpool 1812

